

VZCZCXRO3243
OO RUEHPA
DE RUEHUJA #2345/01 3361750
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
O 011750Z DEC 08
FM AMEMBASSY ABUJA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 4584
INFO RUEHZK/ECOWAS COLLECTIVE
RUEHSA/AMEMBASSY PRETORIA 1528
RUEHYD/AMEMBASSY YAOUNDE 0518
RUEHOS/AMCONSUL LAGOS 0355
RHMFIS/HQ USAFRICOM STUTTGART GE
RHEBAAA/DEPT OF ENERGY WASHDC
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHINGTON DC
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC
RUEKDIA/DIA WASHDC
RHMFIS/HQ USEUCOM VAIHINGEN GE
RUZEJAA/JAC MOLESWORTH RAF MOLESWORTH UK

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ABUJA 002345

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR AF/W, INR/AA, DRL - KAREN GILBRIDE, DS/IP/AF,
DS/TIA/ITA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/31/2017

TAGS: PGOV PHUM KIRF ASEC NI

SUBJECT: NIGERIA: VIOLENCE SUBSIDES IN PLATEAU STATE; BUT
TENSION STILL SIMMERS

REF: ABUJA 2328

Classified By: Political Counselor Walter Pflaumer for reasons 1.4 (b & d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: After three days of political-turned-ethnoreligious violence, a forced calm was restored to Plateau State's capital of Jos when the Nigerian military occupied the city and imposed a curfew on November 30. The violence that erupted on November 27 due to alleged vote rigging in the Jos North Local Government Area (LGA) elections resulted in a death toll of perhaps over 400 people; the loss of hundreds of homes, churches, and businesses; and the displacement of several hundred people forced into IDP camps with inadequate food or resources. Although there is a sizable American population living in Jos, Mission contacts with Amcits wardens in the city indicate that no Amcits were injured or otherwise involved in the violence. Although Governor Jonah Jang's curfew, shoot-on-sight directive to security forces, and request for military assistance restored the semblance of peace, the respite may not last. Many believe the violence will resume once the military presence diminishes or when the government attempts to swear in the supposed winner of the Jos North LGA Chairmanship election. Due to the violence, the state postponed the swearing in of the 17 Local Government Chairmen elected on November 27, but still plans to reschedule it for later this week. The political tensions which started the chaos soon took on a religious character that has pitted Muslim against Christian and allegedly has Muslim leaders calling for retribution. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (C) The violence that erupted in Plateau State's capital city of Jos on November 27 has by now subsided due to the Nigerian military taking control of security in the city. The chaos that began amidst rumors of vote rigging in the Jos North Local Government Area (LGA) elections lasted for three days and resulted in hundreds of deaths; the destruction of homes, churches, and business; and the reported displacement of hundreds of people. While the state's Minister of Information Nuhu Gagara told the press that the official death toll was only 200, most other observers reported over 400 casualties, with the likelihood that the number would increase once people were allowed to move about the city. Media reports claim close to 400 Muslim victims alone were brought to area Mosques for mass burials. There was little press coverage on the number of Christian victims, however

Mission contacts in Jos claimed that the local morgue was full and was forced to turn away another 200 deceased over the weekend. By contrast, Clinton Garuba, Special Assistant to the Governor of Plateau State, told Poloff that the press greatly exaggerated the number of casualties and that there were only 150 deaths.

¶ 13. (C) Members of the Mission's Locally Engaged Staff (LES) reported that many of their family members were forced to relocate to impromptu "refugee" camps set up around Jos; these were seriously lacking in food and resources. Reports indicate that there were over 200 Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) at the University of Jos alone. Several sources corroborated reports that the state government had not made any effort to provide relief for the hundreds of IDPs who lost their homes and belongings.

¶ 14. (C) We estimate that there are approximately 150-200 American citizens, primarily missionaries and their families, living in Jos. Wardens and other contacts reported no Americans harmed or injured. Mission security officers coordinated with the Nigeria Police Force to provide safe passage out of Jos for interested parties on the morning of November 29. 55 people (including 10-20 Amcits) took advantage of the police escort and traveled safely to Abuja.

¶ 15. (C) The Mission's wardens in Jos, many of whom have lived there for decades, said that although the violence was worse than what they witnessed in previous outbreaks, such as the 2001 religious riots that led to the death of over 1,000 people, they had no plans to leave. They reported, however,

ABUJA 00002345 002 OF 002

that they were not surprised by the events and had made preparations anticipating increased tension prior to the LGA elections. Most also agreed that the current calm was just a lull and that it was only a matter of time before the violence reignedited, especially if the state government attempted to swear in the highly contested winner of the Jos North LGA election.

¶ 16. (C) Despite the fact that allegations of vote count manipulation initiated the violence, Special Assistant to the Governor Garuba emphatically stated to Poloff that the state government would "absolutely not" contemplate canceling the results. He added that there were plans to proceed with the swearing in of the 17 newly elected Local Government Chairmen before week's end.

¶ 17. (C) While a struggle for political office sparked the violence, it is being treated here almost entirely as an ethno-religious conflict. Some media reports appeared skewed, highlighting the number of Muslim victims only and suggesting that Christian groups instigated the violence. Christian groups have responded angrily, claiming that just as many Christians were killed, and repeating reports that Muslim leaders have been heard calling for "retribution." Special Assistant Garuba expressed the state government's anger over international news outlets apparently reporting that the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) was suspected of starting the attacks. Garuba alleged that it was in fact "mercenaries" from Sokoto and the Republic of Niger, whom he described as "Muslim fanatics," who were responsible for the crisis.

¶ 18. (C) Despite the Governor's adamant denial that the crisis in Jos could spread to other areas, many sources agreed that there is a real chance the violence could affect other cities with similar ethno-religious tensions, such as Kano, Kaduna, Zaria, and Lafia. Mission contacts also allege evidence of continued transport and distribution of arms en route to Jos. They added that if those trying to transport arms into Jos are turned away by the military, they may try to involve neighboring towns and cities.

¶ 19. (C) COMMENT: Similar outbreaks of ethnic violence have

occurred many times before in Jos, including most recently in 1994, 2001 and 2004. As in those outbreaks, the context is underlying tension and political rivalry between a mostly Muslim and Hausa town in a state which is mostly Christian and non-Hausa. Section 14.3 of the Nigerian Constitution ensures that its government will reflect the country's "federal character," insuring that there be "no predominance" of people from any ethnic group or state in any part of the government. In the Nigerian interpretation of this clause, the key word is "from." While any Nigerian can theoretically live anywhere in the country, only those "from" Plateau state have a right to serve in the state government. The Christian non-Hausa peoples of the state have used their control of the state government to deny automatic "indigene" status to Hausas. Thus, while most of the Hausas of Jos are descendants of people who moved into the area in the 1920s, they are largely barred from serving in the state civil service (a major source of jobs and locus of power). The LGA Chairmanship is important because the Chairman can issue certificates of "indigene-ship" to residents born in his Area, whatever their ethnic background. We believe it extremely unlikely that the Christian non-Hausa PDP Chairmanship candidate could have won a fair election against the Muslim Hausa ANPP candidate in the strongly Muslim and Hausa Jos North LGA. If the state government attempts to swear in the PDP candidate while current tensions remain fresh, additional violence is quite possible. END COMMENT.

Sanders